

It's Smart To Be Gallery Wise!

THE WILLIAM ROCKHILL NELSON GALLERY OF ART

ATKINS MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

NEWS FLASHES

September 1, 1937

PAINTINGS BY WILLIAM CARY: On Sunday, August 29th, an exhibition of paintings by William de la Montagne Cary will open in the Loan Galleries. Etcher, sculptor and painter, Cary was especially well equipped, technically and sympathetically, to depict the far West and Indian life. Friend and associate of General Cutler, General Phil Sheridan and Andrew Dawson, he lived from 1861 to 1875 among the Indians, the old military posts and the scenes that he depicted. He knew and traveled with "Buffalo Bill" Cody, and has left us many records of this intrepid scout and express rider.

Cary was born in Rockland Lake, New York, in 1840 and later was taken by his parents to New York City. Here as a schoolboy he entertained his sisters by drawing animals, and he astonished people with the skill with which he drew buffalo, Indians and other scenes of the West which as yet he had not seen, but only read about. With only a rudimentary art training and fired with enthusiasm by the tales of Fennimore Cooper and the history of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, he left New York at the age of nineteen for St. Louis, then the point of departure for all west-bound passengers.

His original plan had been to proceed by boat to Fort Benton, but an explosion destroyed the river packet and with friends he made the trip over land from Fort Union. Here he encountered many Indian tribes and made friends with such famous chiefs as "Sitting Bull", "Rain-in-the-Face", and "Little Dog". He learned of the customs and superstitions of the Indians first hand, and soon came to have a great respect and fondness for the Redmen, whom he felt had been badly treated by the whites. He learned also to paint the Indian as he really was, not making each one a chief or a medicine man, or indiscriminately painting them all with war bonnets of feathers.

His interest in the West seemed to wane with the coming of railroads, ranches and cowboys, and he spent the last fifty years of his life in New York painting innumerable canvases from the store of sketches and memories that he brought back from the plains and the rockies. At the time of his death in 1922, he left a prodigious number of paintings, but it was only last year in New York that a memorial exhibition of his work was held. At this time, the critic Malcolm Vaughn wrote the following foreword to the catalogue:

"When William Cary left New York in 1861, the city was an overgrown town where herders still drove pigs up Fifth Avenue and one could see goats grazing in the vacant lots of what is now Rockefeller Center. Pushing his way westward to the wild country we know as Montana and Wyoming, he followed in the track of the pioneers, taking with him those instruments of civilization which had as yet scarcely been seen in our northern Rockies, a paint box, palette and brushes.

"His family had wanted him to finish his art studies with a year or two in Paris but he who had just come of age had been caught by another dream. There was already an historical turn to his mind. He wanted to paint Indian life as it still existed in the far West, untamed, aboriginal. In the rousing tales he had heard since childhood there had been conflicting accounts of the Indians. He wanted to see for himself, and to catch down in clear pictures which others could trust, exactly how they lived in their native haunts, what were their habits in camp and afield, the way their minds and bodies reacted to danger, the quality of their worship of nature gods, what kind of clothes they wore, what weapons they carried, in brief, their character and environment. The difficulties he ran into were, of course, numerous and have been written about from time to time, as far back as the 'nineties. But he managed to fulfill his dream.

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"Cary was essentially a man of the eye. His paintings offer us records of a kind he would not have attempted had he been an emotionalist. Of his kind he is valuable. What he essayed he accomplished well, surprisingly well in the circumstances. His pictures stand as accurate, first-hand documents of a vanished age. They are prized as trusty witnesses of scenes and subjects few living men remember. He is a pictorial historian to whom the nation must ever be grateful, an artist who must in time become as warmly cherished as the colonial American painters we have at last saved from oblivion and honored with affection."

In reviewing this exhibition, Thomas Craven wrote: "That the Wild West is still extraordinarily popular in paint is attested by the recent exhibition of William Cary's 'Frontier Days'. These canvases, painted in the old-fashioned style employed by shop window performers, attracted crowds of visitors who were fascinated by the subjects and were not too critical of the technical crudities. Cary, now a forgotten man, was one of the bravest of those painter-historians who were not, strictly speaking, imaginative artists. He has been superseded by a school of painters who are far superior to him in draughtsmanship. His paintings have little value as works of art, but they have a very high value as authentic records of a dramatic period in American history".

The exhibition will remain on view until the first of October.

MASTERPIECE FOR SEPTEMBER: No period of ladies' fashion has offered a costume more entrancing than the lovely Chinese coat of Ming splendor which will be the featured masterpiece during the month of September. The beauty of design, colour, and workmanship denote its creation by skilled artisans, probably for the use of an imperial concubine of the 17th century. The coat is woven in silk and gold k'o-ssu, the aristocratic tapestry stitch which the Chinese evolved over a thousand years ago. A rich powder blue was used as the background colour in this robe, with delicate floral sprays in shades of red, yellow, blue, green, lavender, and orange freely drawn on the blue. Eight large circular medallions, the collar, and a panel which covers the front opening are woven of gold thread, which remains untarnished three hundred years after its use. This is a garment which without doubt ranked as a masterpiece even in the age in which it was woven. Its excellent state of preservation today is in all probability due to the respect which its fresh beauty has inspired in succeeding generations. The coat, which is a recent acquisition in the Oriental Department, is of especial interest to us, as it comes from the collection of Mrs. Harry Hussey, now of Peiping, but formerly a resident of Kansas City.

BEAD PICTURES: For the month of September, Gallery XV will be installed with a collection of Bead Pictures, lent by Mr. and Mrs. Frank Burroughs Mulford of Chicago. The group has been shown at the museum in New London, Connecticut, and at the Chicago Art Institute.

The technique of bead Pictures flourished in Europe and America between the years 1800 and 1840. No doubt they vied in popularity with samplers and were made by genteel womenfolk who prided themselves on their needlework. Some of them were knitted after a very complicated pattern which required great patience. Perhaps less difficult was the method of sewing the beads on a cloth background. For this, the finest of needles were used, and again deftness was called into play as the beads were always arranged to slant in the same direction.

In the group now to be shown at the Gallery, landscape subject matter seems the most popular, although there are some religious ones, for example the very ambitious copy of a Raphael Madonna and several portraits, including a very dashing one of Charles X of France, mounted on a charger. The landscapes are always active with little genre scenes.

Perhaps the most interesting picture in the group is one that belonged to the ill-fated Empress Carlotta of Mexico, and which hung in her bedroom. It is large and depicts a horse and a crane in a fanciful, rocky landscape. It is unique in technique, as it is heavily padded as in 17th century stemp work, and gives a very realistic effect.

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SUMMER EXHIBITIONS: During the summer months, there were several interesting temporary exhibitions. The last week of July, a group of enlargements from Leica Photographs were shown, and proved to be extremely successful and a great drawing card. Not since Whistler's "Mother" was here at the time of the opening have there been so many telephone inquiries about an exhibition. It was apparent that all Kansas City has become "candid camera" conscious. The Gallery in which they were shown was thronged constantly and many of the very informal "shots" recalled the first use of a candid camera. It was in 1860 when one Skaife was arrested in London on the charge of pointing a weapon at Queen Victoria during one of her public appearances. When the weapon was examined, it proved to be a miniature camera with which Skaife was attempting to obtain an unposed photograph of the popular sovereign.

This group was followed in August by the United States Camera Salon, a more formal exhibition of photography which is first shown in Radio Center in New York in the fall and then circulated throughout the country. Nearly every type of photographic subject was included, from amusing "candid shots" to beautifully posed portraits. Examples of news, sports, and illustration were also included. Many of them were remarkable in their composition, their reproduction of textures and in the very startling effects of lighting. All the outstanding photographers in America contributed, Arnold Genthe, Lejaren Hiller, Rockwell Kent, Nickolas Muray, Charles Sheeler and Edward Steichen. The latter is the dean of all camera men in this country, and many of the men, particularly Kent and Sheeler, are perhaps better known as painters. This interest in photographs is so wide-spread that it is hoped that during this coming season the new Camera Salon can be shown.

Of particular interest was a group of drawings, watercolours, and paintings by Herman Schmidt, a young German artist. There has been much comment of late in the press on the recent exhibition held in Munich, in which the government separated desirable art from what they considered atrocious and undermining modern tendencies. Last summer, the work of Schmidt, who was painting in Berlin, appeared accepted, but as shown in this exhibition, it is a far cry from pretty or even regimented art. His drawings show great strength, almost crudity, and it would seem that he was strongly influenced by Käthe Kollwitz, that superb and moving artist who had such sympathy and understanding for the masses. With her, he depicted his subjects without mawkish sentimentality. Poverty and despair are not beautiful, and he drew them as they are, in all their ugliness. Some have felt that his crudity is too brutal, that there is boorish resignation in some of his figures. Rembrandt and Daumier in their time were criticized for the same thing. Both of them had purpose and a cause in their work; neither of them ever painted a pretty picture.

DONA MARIANA OF AUSTRIA: Our "Penitent Magdalene" by El Greco continues to receive praise in Paris where it is now being shown in the first exhibition ever held in France devoted entirely to the work of the great Spanish artist.

In its place in Gallery VII, our fine portrait of Dona Mariana of Austria by Velazquez' pupil Juan Carreno de Miranda, has been hung. She is a most interesting person, as she was the second wife of Philip IV of Spain and the mother of Charles II. After the death of her husband, she entered a convent as was often the custom, and she is depicted here as a Prioress. She was considerably younger than Philip and there are a number of portraits of her as a girl by Velazquez. This later representation by his favorite pupil, is the finest likeness as a mature woman and shows the familiar and characteristic Hapsburg eyes, mouth, and chin. Carreno evidences his great dependence upon his master and has treated the black and white of the habit particularly well.

CLASSES FOR CHILDREN: The winter Saturday Classes for Children will begin on October 2nd, but registration may be made any time after September 15th. There is an enrollment fee of \$1.00 for the twenty-six classes, and the enrollment will be limited to 250. Classes in drawing, clay modeling, Indian crafts, marionettes and general activities will be given, and as there is a great demand for

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all these interesting subjects, it is recommended that registration be made as soon as possible after September 15th.

Both Miss O'Donnell and Miss Nelson made an extensive study this summer of educational activities in other museums and will have a number of new projects and ideas for the winter work.

The Gallery Games have proved very popular and will be continued each Saturday from ten until four-thirty. Drawing for Fun will be resumed on the first Saturday in September, meeting as usual in the auditorium at two o'clock. No enrollment is necessary for these activities which are open to any child visiting the Gallery on Saturday.

William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art  
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